Sidewalk Talk

Our friends at Sidewalk Talk — a nonprofit organization founded in San Francisco — started an international listening movement that believes we are all responsible for one another's mental health…and we couldn't agree more.

Sidewalk Talk teaches people how to be effective listeners and compassionate community members so everyone can support one another. City leaders and volunteers set up their chairs, literally on the sidewalk, and listen to people who want to talk. If needed, they refer people to no-cost and low-fee mental health resources.

With chapters throughout California as well as nationwide, you can play a role as a listening volunteer by clicking here. If you're interested in bringing Sidewalk Talk to your area, read more here to learn how to get started.

When we learn to be better listeners we directly impact the mental health of everyone in our lives, even our own. Sidewalk Talk has provided the following tips so you can master the skill. Focus on one element a week to begin to master listening and be on your way to making it your new permanent habit.

7 Listening Tips

1 Decide to Listen

Set aside time and make the intention to listen to really understand someone.

2 Be Calm and Stay Calm

Relax your body so you feel open. Take deep breaths. Keep the pace of the conversation slow and soft.

3 Don't Assume "Bad Intentions"

Remember that a person's words, point of view or big feelings are not about being mean or insulting to you. Don't take anything personally. Just keep listening.

4 Be Curious

What questions can I ask to help me know this person more? Can I be curious instead of judgmental?

5 Make Eye Contact

Are my eyes wandering around? Am I tempted to pick up a phone? Stay focused on the person you are listening to.

6 Don't Interrupt

Am I waiting my turn to speak? Am I tempted to fill up the silent spaces? Go slow.

7 Be A Sounding Board

Validate the speaker's experience with statements like "I hear you" or "I get it" etc. rather than giving advice.